



NEWSLETTER

Saltire Society Edinburgh Branch

Dear Member,

As many of you already know the **Royal Overseas League**, the venue for all the Branch events for almost twenty years, has closed at the end of January. It seems that the handsome and charismatic building in Princes Street has some very serious structural issues which will require further investigation and subsequent repairs. While all this is going on, therefore, it will remain closed to the public for the foreseeable future. All remaining Branch events will now be held at the **Royal Scots Club, 29/31 Abercromby Place, Edinburgh!** Our move there started with the February lunch so we have already received a friendly welcome from Manager Adrian Hayes and his team.

NEW item! Starting from this issue, in addition to the usual quotation "What they say about..." we are introducing a new feature called "**Poetry Corner**" where we aim to present either a short poem or an extract of a longer one. We hope members will find this new addition interesting and enjoyable. We are grateful to Committee member Neville Singh for suggesting "Road to Darkness", by Liu Xia, as first poem in our series.

As far as our **Spring/Summer programme** we can look forward to **our two remaining lunches**. On **3 March** guest speaker will be **Susan Emslie**, Director of the City of Edinburgh Primary Music School accompanied by a number of pupils who will give us a musical presentation. The last lunch will be on **7 April**, when photographer and film-maker **Moya McDonald's** topic will be 'An Orcadian Film Pioneer'. Guest of Honour for our **Annual Dinner on 4 May** will be **Professor Jim Hunter**, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of the Highlands and Islands. Our **AGM** will be on **18 May** and will be followed by the **Edinburgh Philosophical Institution Lecture** given by **Ali Bowden**, Director of the UNESCO Edinburgh City of Literature Trust. Our last event of the season will be the **Summer Outing on 9 June (please note change of date!)** which this year will take us on an exciting trip on the **Border Railway**. (Please see separate yellow information sheet for details on the excursion). You will find a list of all events on page 4 of this Newsletter. We do hope some of them will stimulate your interest and that you will continue to support the Branch in all its activities.

Laura Scott
Editor

Report from Saltire Council and HQ Update

The Principal of St Andrews University **Professor Sally Mapstone** has accepted the **Presidency of the Society**. Dolina MacLennan was co-opted onto the Council. It is hoped that the **Society AGM** could be held on **Saturday 22 September** again in Dundee if the newly-opened V&A Museum can host it. Confirmation notice will be sent out in good time. Saltire Society trust fundraiser **Dianne Stein** is continuing to develop funding packages that will appeal to sponsors and funders with an aim of coming up with three years of endowment funding. The **Hidden Doors event in Leith at the end of May** will be receiving Saltire Society support, and **Jenny Lindsay's** appointment as a judge has secured its involvement in the **Wigtown Book Festival**. The Institution of Civil Engineers seem determined to run their own awards, and the **Arts and Crafts Awards and Outstanding Women of Scotland** would happen this year only if they were funded. Nevertheless the crisis engulfing Creative Scotland might enhance the appeal of the Saltire brand. **The new Chairman of Creative Scotland is Robert Wilson, who had hosted the Branch summer outing to Jupiter Artland in 2010.** The concept of Friends was not applicable to Edinburgh with virtually no free events but could have relevance in a place like Arran where many people already belonged to another society with similar aims. **The Fletcher of Saltoun Lecture** was given this year by musicologist **John Purser** on 20 February to great acclaim.

John Yellowlees, Branch Representative

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Please note that due to the temporary closure for refurbishments of the Royal Overseas League all future Branch events will now be held at the Royal Scots Club, 29-31 Abercromby Place, Edinburgh until further notice.

Branch AGM Calling Notice

The **Annual General Meeting of the Edinburgh Branch** will be held on **Friday 18 May 2018 at 7pm** at the Royal Scots Club, 29-31 Abercromby Place, Edinburgh.

The **Agenda** will be as follows:

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of AGM on 19 May 2017
3. Matters arising not on the agenda
4. Reports
 - a) Chairman's Report
 - b) Secretary's Report
 - c) Treasurer's Report
5. Election of Office Bearers and Committee
6. Any Other Competent Business
7. Date of 2019 AGM

Members are invited to give their support to the Branch by attending. Volunteers and/or nominations to stand on the Committee are welcome.

The meeting will be followed by the **Edinburgh Philosophical Institution Lecture** given by Ali Bowden on the *Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust* (please see page 4 for details)

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Branch events from the Autumn/Winter

(John Yellowlees, Secretary)



At our **October** lunch Angela Hunter told us how she completed a large commission for the Turnbull Clan Association in 2009, making a monument to commemorate the event whereby the first of the Turnbells, one William de Rule, saved King Robert The Bruce from being gored by a wounded bull. Among her other commissions, penguins by the City Churches in Dundee gave an opportunity for humour since it was reckoned that the worshippers needed cheered up, and while the little birds have been vandalised with paint, their wax polish facilitated

removal of the graffiti. A monkey on an information sign in Dundee recalled an organ grinder's visits for a fair, while a squirrel at the city's High Street celebrates its record population of squirrels in Camperdown Park. Rugby commentator Bill McLaren is remembered in Murrayfield Stadium, and at Gourrock her Radical War Memorial commemorates the eight dead in the uprising of 1820 whose survivors were sentenced by Sir Walter Scott to build the Radical Road round Salisbury Crags. Gourrock also has a life-sized girl on a suitcase, with destination labels on her suitcases, and a recent commission for the Friends of Wemyss Bay Station is a boy dressed in 1950s style carrying a boat and a fishing line

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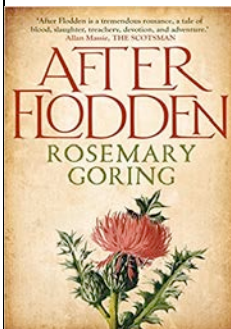
In **November** Joanna Macpherson told us that her grandfather bought Wester Ross's Attadale Estate in 1952, and having spent childhood holidays there she and her husband moved up from London five years ago. Joanna's background is in marketing, and she decided that a little television exposure might do no harm, so invited Giles Coren to cover stalking for Our Food, took part in Lady Lairds which followed events over a year on four Highland estates run by women, welcomed Paul Merton to Attadale in Secret Stations (Attadale is a

request stop on the Kyle Line) and got 1.8 seconds in a whisky advertisement with David Beckham. Mainstays of the Estate are stalking and salmon-farming. Conifers are being replaced by native broadleaved species in association with development of hydro-power and re-establishment of red squirrels. Holiday cottages have been accompanied by local long-term lettings, a bothy eight miles up in the hills offers overnight accommodation except in the stalking season, and the Lochcarron Highland Games have a mix of heavy sports, dancing and pipe-bands. The Schrodgers owners after 1910 started its Gardens, which have expanded from opening one day a year to daily opening from Easter to October, appealing to painters and with an honesty box inviting visitors to help themselves to tea and coffee.

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Also in **November** we were shown round the newly-restored Riddle's Court, given a £6.1M restoration as the Patrick Geddes Centre by the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust whose Sarah Gear who told us that it had hosted a banquet held in 1598 by James VI for the Danish Royal Family. By 1616 Alexander Seton the Lord Chancellor of Scotland was in residence, and in the eighteenth century it became part of Edinburgh's academic quarter, in the 1750s accommodating David Hume. The nineteenth century saw a decline as the well-to-do had moved to the New Town, until Patrick Geddes rescued the neighbourhood, applying what he called conservative surgery for the creation of student residences. In 1946 Edinburgh Corporation arrived with some use for housing and in 1951 the Festival Fringe made an appearance, adult education from 1956 leading twenty years later to the presence of the Workers Educational Association but there was a prolonged decline until SHBT came to the rescue in 2011. During restoration the Trust discovered a fireplace and additional beams, and when inserting a lift has left exposed a wall of rubble since there is no part of the building that was not significant. The Geddes Room retains a painted ceiling that tells the building's history and is among those available for hire, while a lovely flat is let on airbnb and the Trust has retained the top floor as its offices.



Our **December** lunch had two speakers, Rosemary Goring and her husband Alan Taylor. A French novelist on hearing of her novel After Flodden asked Rosemary "how many did you kill?", which was a reminder of her own bewilderment at that period of history which had first prompted her interest. King James IV has often been seen as a dreadful human being, but historian Norman MacDougall contends that until his last day he did nothing wrong. The French novelist had never heard of Flodden, so was unaware of how her countrymen let the Scots down by their late appearance. The ruin and mayhem that followed the loss of ten thousand Scots lives meant that Scotland would never be the same again, and having discovered the King's secretary Sir Patrick Paniter in

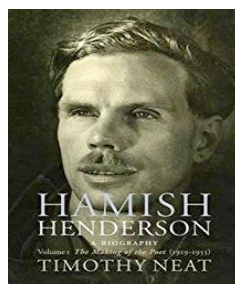
historical records Rosemary determined to tell the story of the aftermath from his perspective. Rosemary was writing her novel at the time of the Iraq War, and the suicide of Dr David Kelly helped bring to the fore the question of who was advising the leaders, which made her see Sir Patrick as an Alastair Campbell of his day. The Border characters that she introduced to the story were inspired by the area's rugby players of today, tough and committed to what they had to do, but not evil and cast against a poverty-stricken landscape in which the whole of Northumberland was thought to have boasted only four carts. She introduced one or two other real characters including Thomas Dacre, Lord Warden of the King's Marches who would go on to face trial before Cardinal Wolsey in the Star Chamber.

Hailing Muriel Spark as the greatest Scottish writer of the last hundred years, Alan Taylor said that the Floo'ers o' the Forest were also a reference to the Fallen of the Great War whose demise left her most famous character Miss Jean Brodie a spinster. Reared by her parents in their Bruntfield flat, Muriel walked from there to James Gillespie's High School, the Marcia Blane's of Miss Jean Brodie, and to Morningside Public Library. Her favourite teacher Miss Christina Kay recognised her at just eleven as a dreamer, telling her that she was destined to be a writer. Muriel had one brother Philip, and it was in



the Royal Overseas League that she met her husband Sydney Oswald Spark whose initials she would say afterwards should have warned her off him, but instead they married and she followed him to Rhodesia, and after coming home in the middle of the Second World War she left her son Robin with her parents while making her way in London. Putting everything on the pitch, Muriel had no time for fame, leaving when it got in her way and settling for her last forty years with her companion Penelope in the Italian town of Arezzo. She was always glamorous, and suffered the irreconcilability of the relationship with her son Robin whose response to her leaving him in the care of grandparents was to accuse her of casting doubt on his Jewishness, but it is for her productivity that she should be remembered, with an output of twenty-three novels. 2018 sees the centenary of her birth, marked by a series of events at the Usher Hall and elsewhere, with a writers' programme and exhibition at the National Library.

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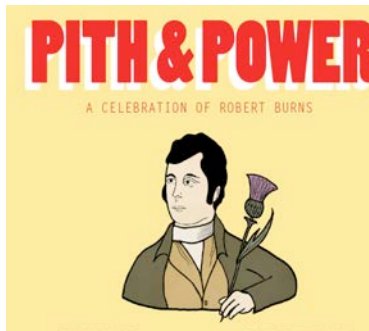
At our **January** lunch, the last to be held at the Royal Overseas League, Timothy Neat told us that the common folk and the poets recognised Hamish Henderson, but the wider Scottish persona found him wanting. As a man and a poet he was committed to nurturing, touching, changing a Scotland devastated by the Great War and Great Depression, braced by great pride, empire, education and a deep sense of service. It was with the Scots people that Hamish wished to speak, and the best way to do this was to build on Scotland's folk-cultural heritage. The poets he admired most were those who married the oral and literary traditions. Anyone seeking to move in such company risked being cut down to size, and he knew that most of Scotland's

major artists suffered exile in one form or another. He allied natural authority with a charismatic genius that ensured loyal and gifted friends gathered recurrently round him. He fed them, they fed him, and amongst them the poets understood him, at the deepest level, best. Hamish enjoyed his moment in the sun of youth and Italy, but after the war he had to take up the burden of his people's doom and suffer the dark and cold of his benighted homeland. With Glasgow poet Morris Blythman and his wife Marian, both Communists, he organised a commemoration for the 25th anniversary of the death of John MacLean in which Blythman sought to present Hamish as the new MacLean. The fifties and sixties were hard decades, for the folk scene was flourishing, but he was always struggling to make ends meet, his personal creativity in abeyance, his destiny apparently stymied. Tom Scott however believed that Hamish might still do something astounding for Scots as Yeats had done for Irish literature, and Hamish's relationship with Hugh MacDiarmid and Norman MacCaig was far more dynamic and productive than commonly thought. In 1997 Angus Calder wrote Ayent the Referendum - for Hamish Henderson, looking back and forward to measure Hamish's influence on contemporary Scotland



The speaker at our **first lunch in the Royal Scots Club in February**, Simon Fairnie is the son of a fishing family whose ancestry can be traced back to the early 1700s. He was born and brought up in Fisherrow where he has lived all his life, and is Treasurer of the Musselburgh Museum and Heritage Group and coordinator of Musselburgh Museum. He told us how women gathered mussels from the local mussel-beds, working at home with shelling knives to remove the flesh and placing them alternately with lugworms on the fishing lines. The fish thus caught they laid out for merchants to buy and take away in baskets, with an evening sale to local residents announced by a man shouting "fish roup, buy who will!" Loading their creel and skull baskets onto the electric tram in front by the driver, women travelled from Levenhall to Joppa, then walked up Fishwives Causeway to sell their fish in the town. Some boiled their mussels and sold them for sixpence a saucer at places like Musselburgh Racecourse : one lady had a barrow, then when she got too old was able to manage a fish shop. Girls were taken to the dressmaker, then the basket-maker, and would be given some of their mother's customers to get them started : they would tell their mother but never their husband what they earned. Women went "to the creel" because of tradition and to be the breadwinner. There was a matriarchal society, with the men away at the fishing. Gala clothes

worn for special occasions were handed down from mother to daughter. Shrewd women, they came to own many of the boats. The very last was Betty Millar BEM who was told that for health and safety reasons she could no longer spread her fish on the pavement in Comiston, so she bought a van. Betty retired in 1988 and died in 2000 and, several others having recently followed her, the very last living fishwife is now 98. The volunteer-run Musselburgh Museum created in 2010 at 65 High Street seeks to preserve their heritage, and is open on Thursdays to Saturdays during April-September. We hope to organize a visit there sometimes during the summer.



Pith & Power, A Celebration of Robert Burns, an Illustrated exhibition arranged by artist Andrew Redmond Barr and exploring Robert Burns' relationship with politics and power is currently on show at Saltire Society HQ, 9 Fountain Close, Edinburgh until the 15th of March.

Open Monday to Thursday, 12pm – 4pm

For more information please contact the Saltire Society directly by phoning 0131 556 1836.

Branch Membership

We give a very warm welcome to two new members of the Branch: **Professor Joe Goldblatt**, (who has already joined us at our January lunch) and **Mrs Anne Pia**. We hope they will be able to attend some of our future events.

Sadly, we have to report the passing of **Mr George Strang** and the resignation of **Mrs Nora Smith**.

What they say about.... the Scottish Enlightenment

....."the Scottish Enlightenment was the natural, almost the inevitable, outcome of several centuries of Scottish and European intellectual history".

John MacQueen: *Progress and Poetry: The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh 1982), p.5

Poetry Corner

Road to Darkness (for Xiaobo)

*Sooner or later you will leave
me, one day
and take the road to darkness
alone.
I pray for the moment to reappear
so I can see it better,
as if from memory.
I wish that I, astonished, could glow, my body
In full bloom of light for you.
But I couldn't have made it
except clenching my fists, not letting
the strength,
not even a little bit of it, slip
through my fingers.*

Liu Xia, (widow of Liu Xiaobo,
Translated from the Chinese by Ming Di

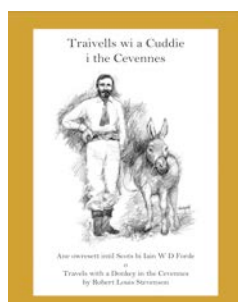
Note: **Liu Xiaobo** was a Chinese poet, literary critic and human rights activist. Incarcerated as political prisoner, he died of cancer on 13 July 2017. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010 *in absentia*. His place on the podium was represented by an Empty Chair specially arranged for the event by Scottish PEN who adopted him as one of their Writers in Prison.

News Digest

Common sense has prevailed.....



The **City of Edinburgh Junior Music School at Flora Stevenson Primary**, to which the Branch donated several instruments has, for a short time, been at risk of closure. Due to budget cuts the City Council Head of Schools announced last October their intention to merge and redistribute the specialist facilities both at the Junior and the Senior at Broughton High School to four sites across the city. Luckily such was the level of protest from critics, former pupils, renown musicians, parents and indeed the Edinburgh Branch of the Saltire Society that the Council rapidly backed down. For the moment at least the Junior Music School is safe. So what better opportunity to support their excellent work than coming along to the **lunch on 3rd of March when the Director, Susan Emslie will speak about the school and some of the pupils will delight us with a live performance!**



Robert Louis Stevenson in Scots

Saltire member Iain Forde has now completed the translation into Scots of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*. As we read in the blurb Stevenson wrote the book after his expedition in 1878, and after he first met Fanny Osborne at Fontainbleu in 1876. He was at a boundary line of his life: between the old argumentative Scottish world of religious debate and the freedom of the planet that was to continue for the rest of his life. This book marks the division between his family background and his ambitions: the world of the practical and that of imagination. The book, which in Scots bears the title of ***Traivells wi a Cuddie i the Cevennes***, is published by Fons Scotiae (www.fons-scotiae.com). Branch members will be able to buy it at the special discounted price of £8.99 with free p&p.. For more information on this and other books in Scots please contact Susan Forde at susanforde@fons-scotiae.scot or telephone 01592 840128 or write to Fons Scotiae, Causewayend, Main Street, Scotlandwell, Kingross-shire KY13 9JA

The Royal High School of Edinburgh...the saga continues!



The proposed conversion of the Old Royal High School building on Calton Hill into a luxury hotel is still unresolved. As members are aware the two extremely large wings in the original proposal were refused planning and listed building consent. An appeal by the developers to the Scottish Government is currently pending while various initiatives to support the defence of the building are ongoing. The Royal High School, by architect Thomas Hamilton, is one of the finest Neo-Greek revival buildings in the world and was one of the few buildings highlighted in the 1995 World Heritage Site inscription process. An alternative proposal for its use, supported by 80% of Edinburgh residents is to relocate St Mary's Music School to the site and build a new concert hall, creating a "centre for excellence" for music.

Branch Programme Spring/Summer 2018 - PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF VENUE!!

A reminder to members of the **Spring/Summer events**. Please note that the evening lecture following the AGM is free but the **Annual Dinner** must be booked and paid in advance (a separate booking form is enclosed). This year the **Summer Outing** will be an open day, no booking required. Please see separate information sheet for all details. **Do come along and bring friends with you! We do hope to see many of you!**

Last 2 lunches of the 2017/2018 series:

Saturday 3 March 2018

12.15 for 12.30pm at the Royal Scots Club

Susan Emslie on *The City of Edinburgh Primary Music School*

Moya McDonald on *An Orcadian Film Pioneer*

Saturday 7 April 2018

6.30 for 7pm at the Royal Scots Club

Guest of Honour Professor Jim Hunter

Annual Dinner

Friday 4 May 2018

7pm at the Royal Scots Club

followed by the **Edinburgh Philosophical Institution Lecture** (7.30pm)

Our speaker will be Ali Bowden on *the Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust*

Branch AGM

Friday 18 May 2018

Summer outing

Saturday 9 June 2018 (New date!)

A trip on the Border Railway

For details on the excursion please see **separate information sheet**

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